

“FORENSIC FILES” FOR FORENSIC STUDENTS, AND MORE

Sipakova Irina

Candidate in Linguistics, Associate Professor,

Head of the Chair, Saratov State University,

410012 Russia, Saratov, Astrakhanskaya Street, 83

isipakova@mail.ru

The paper focuses on the benefits of introducing authentic video episodes into university classroom. Watching “Forensic Files”, a popular US documentary-style series about experts cracking crimes promotes forensic students’ language proficiency. The 20-minute long episodes serve as a spring-board for expanding students’ general lexis and building professional vocabulary, give ground for comparison of culturally specific ways of forensic experts’ investigation, provide ideas for group discussions, and further on for academic writing. The series proved to be an effective tool for developing of the 4 skills with non-linguistic students in general. Depending on the objective set, the English teacher can train the students next to everything: grammar, thematic word groups, idioms, link-words, a logical paraphrase, you name it.

Key words: Russian and foreign didactics, visual aids, A1-A2 level, productive activity, English for special purposes

Video materials have been an effective tool of enhancing foreign language acquisition worldwide for at least six decades. However, educational contexts are different, and so are the aims and techniques used in a classroom or outside it. As with any learning tool there is time and place to use them. In this paper I will argue that watching non-educational TV series can promote language learning and motivate even low-level students, provided you definitely realize what teaching objectives you should set for an individual group of students.

Firstly, let us very briefly trace back the theory and practice of introducing visual aids into the classroom. As is well known, the pioneers in this area were the French methodologists Paul Rivance, George Gugeneime, and a Croatian scientist Peter Guberina [4, p.254]. Originally it was created for the starters to build up their speaking skills as an alternative to grammar-translation and direct methods. After watching slide films specially developed around 27 conversational topics, the learners were supposed to memorize basic grammar and every day phrases. It was crucial for the learners to memorize phrases as a whole without any analysis of the grammar used in them. In Russian methodology audio visual technologies were mostly employed to enhance listening skills [3].

The advantages of the audio visual method were obvious but as a separate method it existed for a short time, since underlying the method was an idea that foreign language acquisition was a purely mechanistic process. Subsequent investigations in education, psychology and psycholinguistics convincingly demonstrated the fallacy of this statement, especially as for adults.

Nowadays audio and visual aids are still very important tools of learning and teaching a foreign language, and their potential and best practices of their use for TEFL are being actively investigated and reinterpreted by overseas and Russian educationalists. The most important issues under research are raise of students’ motivation, energizing their cognitive processes, facilitating

4 skills development , social and cultural awareness in various areas, topicality of lexis and grammar [1, pp.41-53], [5, pp.232-249], [10, pp. 131-141]; [6]; [9]; [8].

Very illustrative in this respect is Kieran Donaghy's paper "How can film help you teach or learn English?" in which he highlights the major advantages of learning English through films. Drawing the reader's attention to the hedonistic aspect of watching films, he emphasizes the dramatic role of paralinguistic means of communication, i.e. facial expressions and gestures for the more detailed comprehension [2]. Should we not recall at this point our outstanding methodologist Abram Semenovich Lurye who as far back as in 1968 proved in his dissertation thesis that the more analyzers are involved in information reception, the more effective is the activity. His experimental data showed that in general the optic analyzer works 6,5 times faster than acoustic [7].

Whereas other authors spend pages and pages on describing pros of using films for educational ends, K. Donaghy lists them in a nutshell:

"Film can bring variety and flexibility to the language classroom by extending the range of teaching techniques and resources, helping students to develop all four communicative skills. For example, a whole film or sequence can be used to practise listening and reading, and as a model for speaking and writing. Film can also act as a springboard for follow-up tasks such as discussions, debates on social issues, role plays, reconstructing a dialogue or summarising. It is also possible to bring further variety to the language learning classroom by screening different types of film: feature-length films, short sequences of films, short films, and adverts" [2].

Up to the first decade of this century listening, even if accompanied by visual aids tended to be the least developed skill with most Russian students. It always showed in the results of tests and corresponding sections of the language contests. Nowadays the situation has dramatically changed. The reasons are multiple, the leading being advancement of digital communication technologies. Also, a far reaching factor is a video support to most of the secondary school and university textbooks.

However, as a veteran in using both educational and authentic visual materials I can conclude that unless you make a needs' analysis of a specific group of students you are going to teach and their varying personalities and skills, it is next to impossible to predict what video genre would motivate them. Two student groups with the approximately equal level of knowledge may prefer completely different video materials: costume dramas through reality shows.

Therefore, the sections of Study Programs which list audio, video and Internet resources should be rather descriptive than prescriptive . It is interesting to note, that video materials specially designed by the leading British and American authors in cooperation with BBC and National Geographic are not of real interest for my students, though we regularly update the our chair's video fond. I believe the clue is that they are specially prepared and adapted for teaching (in a very professional and bright manner), but modern students want authenticity. Hence seeking authenticity is a must!

This is the leading reason why, I turned to the American 400-episode serial TV project "Forensic Files" which has been on since 90s in 142 countries.

Firstly I intended it for the students majoring in forensic science. The choice was determined by the several factors

- each episode lasts about 20 minutes which seems to be the limit of our students' attention span;
- covering a real criminal case, it has the format of a reality show which aims at reconstructing the case;
- every episode does not relish the details of the crime and scenes of violence; the focus is on evidence, direct and indirect proofs and various kinds of expertise leading to solving the crime;
- it lacks fights and chasing which take the screen time but do not contribute to language learning; each episode presents interviews with the victims, their relatives, neighbors, experts, witnesses. A variety of visuals and sounds – tones, speech tempo, mimics and gestures – supports a deeper comprehension of the events;
- several times during the episode an off screen voice sums up what has been said and shown earlier. From the TEFL methodology perspective it provides significant lexis recycling;
- each episode has English subtitles which are of great help for students' self-study;
- last but not least, providing the authentic meaningful context, each episode introduces forensic students to basic notions and terminology in their professional area, while students majoring in other areas are developing expertise on interesting topics and become more informed citizens.

The operating procedures are as follows: In class the students watch an episode without subtitles. It is preceded by the title analysis that enhances anticipation of the events. The distinguishing feature of this serial is that the title more often than not contains a pun which is difficult to relate in Russian. "Step by step", for example, not only points implicitly to the graduality of revealing the crime, but also hints at its character: the victim supposedly falls down the steps.

In my opinion, quite a fortunate joking variant was offered by one of the students: "Поступенно". The title "Blanket of Evidence", on the one hand, gives a clue that the blanket is an indication of the crime committed, on the other hand, it realizes one of the meanings "something that makes it hard for you to find information or truth about something" Such analysis should definitely be moderated by the teacher, since my students' previous linguistic experience did not include syncretism of meanings within the same context.

After watching the episode, the students sum up the contents according to an effective storytelling technique: Who – What -Whom – Where – When – Why – How. This exercise is within the powers of even those students who get stressed, when hearing, "And now tell in short what the episode is about". For weaker students one-word answers are allowed. The important point is that the "Who –Why" technique is conducted orally and it engages every student in class. Watching and summarizing the episode's contents is the most time-consuming of all other in-class activities.

At home, the students watch the episode again switching on the subtitles and complete several tasks, some of them are obligatory, others are optional that promotes learners; autonomy.

The sample tasks are listed below:

- Very briefly characterize the character's role in the film, e.g. Kelly is a victim. She is a shop assistant. Thomas is a forensic expert. Lucas is a mayor. Rosie is a witness. The Singletons are the neighbors, etc. Such statements drill the linking verb to be. Additionally, they expand the topical group of professions and social roles in a meaningful context;

- Write down as many facts from the episode as possible, e.g. Mr. Morrison owned a large real estate firm. He married Miriam in 1995. They parted two years later. Such technique consolidates basic knowledge in word order, revises irregular verbs, and new lexis is acquired in a natural way. Checking up is competitive – the student who has composed the most sentences reads them aloud, while others cross out the similar facts. At the beginning of the course the winners made up around 15 sentences per episode, later their number increased up to 50 or 60;

- Put the events 1) in the order of their appearance in the episode 2) sequentially as they happened in real life. This task allows for concentrating attention and developing the capacity of reconstructing the case;

a) Write out the words describing the interior of the house from an attic to the basement b) Group the adjectives denoting emotional states c) Learn the idiomatic expressions. Since the students are non-linguistic, the best explanation of which works is the following: an idiom is an expression whose meaning is not the sum of its constituent meanings. Therefore, this group may comprise, on the one hand, people next door and on the other hand, he waited on her hand and foot. - Such tasks are very helpful for building up students' general English vocabulary;

- Memorize lexemes and collocations nominating specialists in the forensic area, e.g. medical expert, forensic scientist, reconstructionist, so that you are able to use them in a meaningful context;

- Identify direct and indirect evidence. Forensic students raise their terminology knowledge, other non-linguistic students raise their legal awareness;

- Give your opinion on the criminals' behavior (give their psychological portraits). Here are the notes by my students (authors' style and spelling are preserved).

"Steve's mother was ashamed of him because he couldn't achieve the same as his father. For this reason Steve was offended by his mother, angry with her and therefore treated her badly. I think he didn't get along with other people too because even a family friend suspected him of killing his own mother. He wasn't very responsible, he took a lot of money but didn't bother to return it. In addition, Steve was quite cruel and, I guess, didn't regret what he did. He was so angry with his mother that he hit her 6 times before she fell. Then he didn't panic and remained calm enough to adjust the accident. And when she died he was just standing outside, leaving her all alone. In the end we can say, Steve was very depressed by financial difficulties, failures at work and bad relations with his mother."

"Miriam is aggressive person, because the murder is a manifestation of aggression. She is antisocial, because her actions aren't consistent with the norms and rules of behavior of people in society. Miriam is very tricky. She was able to create an alibi. She is a good actress. For a long time she played the role of the victim, truthfully cried and showed emotions of pain and sorrow. Miriam is resistant. When something went wrong, she didn't give up and continued to operate. She is ruthless and cruel. Miriam killed her husband just for money". (Sasha Volodchenko, 2nd year student of Psychology).

As the round-up the most motivated students will make presentations at the University students' scientific conferences, This year the following papers are planned: "Russian and American Procedures of Crime Scene Examination", "Promoting Legal Awareness and Legal Culture through Watching Documentary Style Serials" .

To sum up, hopefully I believe that the ideas, exercises and activities described here combined with the still unrevealed potential of using authentic TV series both in guided and autonomous activities are practically unlimited. Creative teachers supported by motivated students can practically work miracles in a low-level language classroom. The crucial factor is students' interests and creativity of a teacher. In fact, students' language level is secondary, it and may be raised effectively through the guided, semi-guided and creative exercises.

References:

1. Curtis, A. (2007). Film in the ESL classroom: hearing the students' voice. *Language Teacher Research in the Americas: via TESOL Association* (41-53).
2. Donaghy, K. How can film help you teach or learn English? Available at <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/how-can-film-help-you-teach-or-learn-english> (accessed 19.03.2018).
3. Eluhina N.V. Osnovnye trudnosti audirovaniya i puti ih preodoleniya. Hrestomatiya. [The main difficulties of listening and ways of their overcoming. Reader]. Moscow: Russian Language, 1991 (in Russian).
4. Ges N.I., Frolova G.M. Istoriya zarubezhnoy metodiki prepodavaniya inostrannyh yazykov [History of teaching methods of foreign languages abroad]. Moscow: Academy. 2008. P.254 (in Russian).
5. Kaiser, M. (2011). New approaches to exploiting film in the foreign language classroom. *L2 Journal* 3(2), 232-249.
6. Keddie, J. (2014). Bringing online video into the classroom. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. Lur'e A.S. Metodicheskie osnovy ispol'zovaniya tehnikeskikh sredstv pri obuchenii inoyazychnoy leksiki. Avtoref. dis...kand. Nauk. [Methodological foundations of technical aids use while teaching English lexis]. Extended abstract of a PhD dissertation. Moscow, 1968 (in Russian).
8. Pichugova I.L. Ispol'zovanie autentichnyh video materialov na zanyatiyah po professional'nomu inostrannomu yazyku. [Use of authentic audio materials in professional English class]. *Young Scientist: All-Russian Scientific Journal*, 5 (85), 519-521 (in Russian).
9. Pisarenko V.I. Metodika ispolzovaniya videomaterialov v obuchenii vtoromu inostrannomu yazyky: na materiale frantsuzskogo yazyka v neyazykovom vuze. Avtoref.kand. dissertatsii. [Methods of using video materials while teaching the second foreign language: a case study of teaching French in a non-linguistic university]. Extended abstract of a PhD dissertation. Taganrog. 2002 (in Russian).
10. Soong, D. (2012). Using documentary films in oral interpretation class what is the appropriate length? *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 1(6), 131-141.